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Connelly, Maura (London)

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From: Connelly, Maura
Sent: Thursday, June 08, 2006 4:04 PM
To: Schulz, Kirsten A; Bell, Richard K; Meara, William R; LondonEcon; LondonPol; Roberts, Rick L; Poisson, Beth L
Subject: RE: Sunday Times (London) op-ed

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From: Meara, William R
Sent: Monday, June 05, 2006 10:29 AM
To: LondonEcon; LondonPol; Roberts, Rick L; Poisson, Beth L
Subject: Sunday Times (London) op-ed

Do we have anything to shoot back with on these charges? On the accusation that SECDEF authorized the use of dogs? On the McCain ammendment "signing statement?" On the Hayden testimony re "waterboarding?"

The Sunday Times

June 04, 2006

The horrors really are your America, Mr Bush

Andrew Sullivan

<< OLE Object: Picture (Metafile) >>

'This is not America.' Those words were President George W Bush's attempt to explain the horrors of Abu Ghraib prison on the Arabic-language network Alhurra in 2004. He spoke the words as if they were an empirical matter, but a cognitive dissonance could be sensed through them.

If the men and women who tortured and abused and murdered at Abu Ghraib did not represent America, what did they represent? They wore the uniforms of the United States military. They were under the command of the American military. In the grotesque, grinning photographs they clearly seemed to believe that what they were doing was routine and approved.

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And we now know from the official record that Donald Rumsfeld, the defence secretary, had personally authorised the use of unmuzzled dogs to terrify detainees long before Abu Ghraib occurred, exactly as we saw in those photos. Does the secretary of defence not represent America?

Almost two years after the torture story broke Congress finally roused itself and passed an amendment to a defence appropriations bill by John McCain that forbade the use of any "cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment" of detainees by any American official anywhere in the world. It was passed by veto-proof margins and Bush signed it. But he appended a "signing statement" insisting that, as commander-in-chief, he retained the right to order torture if he saw fit.

And so on May 18 the nominee for CIA director, Michael Hayden, was asked directly by Senator Dianne Feinstein whether he regarded "waterboarding" as a legitimate interrogation technique. Hayden replied: "Let me defer that to closed session, and I would be happy to discuss it in some detail."

Huh? Why a closed session? Isn't the law crystal clear? Isn't strapping a person to a board, tilting him so that his head is below his feet, and pouring water through a cloth into his mouth to simulate drowning a form of "cruel, inhuman and degrading" treatment? And isn't that illegal? In America? Or is that not America either?

I ask these questions because so few in power in Washington want to go there. When I have brought up the question of these atrocities in front of senators and senior administration officials in private, I have noticed something. Their eyes flicker down or away. Some refuse to discuss the matter, as if it is too much to contemplate that the US has become a country that detains people without trial or due process, and reserves the right to torture them.

Or they tell me that however grotesque the charges Bush would never approve of them. It's always someone else's responsibility. "This is not who American servicemen are," Richard Armitage, the then deputy secretary of state, insisted after Abu Ghraib. Or in the words of the secretary of state Condoleezza Rice, in an interview with Al Arabiya: "Americans do not do this to other people."

I know what these people are saying or trying to say. The vast majority of American soldiers are decent, brave, honourable professionals. The America I love and the Americans I know are among the most admirable and open-hearted people on the planet.

But this much must also be said: the words of Bush and Rice and Armitage are still untruths. That much we know. And last week, we had to absorb another dark truth: that in a town called Haditha, US Marines appear to have murdered women and children in cold blood and covered it up.

There is also a new claim of a similar kind of massacre at a place called Ishaqi. Last week the American military issued fresh ethical guidelines for soldiers in Iraq. One marine commander told Time magazine: "If 24 innocent civilians were killed by marines, this will put a hole in the heart of every single marine."

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